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DEVELOPMENT OF LUNAR NOMENCLATURE

Grant NGR 09-015-209

Final Report

Principal Investigator

Dr. Donald H. Menzel

Prepared for

National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Washington, D.C. 20546

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According to the provisions of the NASA contract, I attended at Konstanz, Germany, in May a meeting of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) Working Group on Solar Nomenclature. The entire Working Group attended: Dr. A. Dollfus of France, Dr. B. J. Levin of the USSR, and Dr. Harold Masursky and myself, Chairman, both of the USA. In addition, we were fortunate in having Dr. C. de Jager of the Netherlands, Secretary of the IAU, in attendance at some of the meetings.

Many difficult points of lunar nomenclature were discussed. After long and sometimes difficult negotiations, the Working Group reached a unanimous decision, which we recommended to the General Assembly of the IAU. Dr. de Jager was particularly pleased – such unanimity is always desirable, especially for international problems.

The meetings of the Working Group were continued at Sydney, where, as Chairman, I presented our recommendations to Commission 17, The Moon, of the IAU. Unfortunately, because of illness, Dr. Levin was unable to be present, so the USSR did not have an official representative.

The great majority of our recommendations were accepted by Commission 17. After considerable discussion, it was unanimously agreed that the old, traditional system of Beer and Madler – which employed capital letters to designate satellite craters – could not be further adapted to modern lunar cartography. It was recommended, therefore, that the old system be gradually replaced, with new names assigned to the craters previously designated by letters, such as Macrobius A.

Second – and as a distinct departure from tradition – the members of Commission 17 decided that the names assigned should no longer be restricted to scientists, as they generally had been in the past. The decision was unanimous that further assignments should include great contributors to human knowledge and human culture, such

as writers, artists, and musicians. The Working Group was given wide latitude in this assignment, except that no craters are to be named for political, religious, or military figures or for modern philosophers.

A system of grids dividing the Moon into 144 regions, as in the NASA LAC charts, was also approved, as was a further subdivision of each region into 16 provinces, for a total of 2304 provinces.

The final proposal, recommended unanimously by Commission 17, was also approved unanimously by the Council of the IAU and the IAU General Assembly.

At the General Assembly, the original Working Group, now called a Task Group, was expanded to include the following: Dollfus, Masursky, Dr. El Baz of the USA, Dr. S. K. Runcorn of UK (ex-officio as the new President of Commission 17), and myself, continuing as Chairman. Dr. Levin extended his resignation for reasons of health. We have not yet received formal notice of the appointment of his successor.

The Task Group continues to work closely with NASA in the provision of names for craters and other lunar features and in the continuing program of lunar mapping.

The IAU appointed a second Task Group on general problems of Celestial Nomenclature, including the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, and other objects such as the satellites of Jupiter. I have been named the representative for the lunar features. The objective of this Task Group is unification and standardization of nomenclature.